

Denny Brown has been selected as the 2016 East Maricopa First Things First Champion for Young Children.

The award is given to local champions who actively volunteer their time to raise public awareness of the importance of early childhood development and health. Champions spend a significant amount of time volunteering with FTF and building public awareness about the importance of early childhood issues.

Denny Brown engaged in awareness-raising efforts such as:

- Facilitating introductions between First Things First, the City of Scottsdale, and the Scottsdale Unified School District.
- Attending training on early childhood messaging.
- Writing letters to the editor that show support for early childhood issues.
- Sharing their own early childhood success story.



We recently caught up with Brown, currently a member of the City of Scottsdale Human Services Commission.

Question: Why do you feel early childhood development and health is so important?

Answer: I think we should start creating expectations for parents and children very early. I'm not talking about creating unrealistic goals, I'm talking about everyone, teachers, parents and kids to have expectations for an outcome and having fun along the way. And we can't ignore the fact that if you're hungry, if you don't feel well, if your family member doesn't feel well, if there's stress in the household, a child (who feels everything on some level) will not perform at their best.

Q: What caused you to get involved in efforts to increase public awareness in early childhood issues?

A: I was on the Scottsdale School Board, and now I'm on the Human Services Commission for Scottsdale. We have over 7,000 kids on free and reduced lunch in the Scottsdale Unified School District. That indicates I have families in need. There is no singular agency that can handle all the elements of need. I was aware of First Things First at the district level, and I realized the sooner we get help for our youngest, the better we can serve throughout their school experience.

Q: Why do you feel building awareness in early childhood and developmental health is so important for families and communities?

A: I volunteered for health screening at my neighborhood school. I was primarily checking eyesight. You wouldn't believe how many young people had major problems that had never been diagnosed, because parents didn't take them to the doctor. And then there was the disruptive young man in the back of the room. Teacher was so stressed. Turns out the guy had a hearing problem. There's also the story about the young person in preschool that had a speech problem. He was diagnosed and entered a special ed class. Two years later he entered the gifted program. And by the way he had a perfect score on his ACT as a junior. Early intervention is a must.

Q: How have you seen awareness for the early years change in your community?

A: My Title I schools in south Scottsdale have all shown the benefits of early intervention. Many of our schools have seen excellent grades from the state in recent history. This was not the case a few years ago. I attribute this to a new awareness and focus on getting all parties involved early.

Q: How do you suggest other people in your community get involved?

A: As a parent:

1. Know your teachers.
2. Know your administration.
3. Know the folks at the front desk.

I hope everyone will have expectations for their school experience. It's more than dropping off your child and thinking they will graduate some day. And then decide how you can help. You may need to suggest how you can help. Ask questions.